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The Russo-Byzantine Treaties and the Early Urban Structure of Rus'

JOHN H. LIND

PEREYASLAVL', in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the centre of the principality of the same name, is mentioned in the Russo-Byzantine treaty of 907 which is itself incorporated into the *Povest' vremennykh let* (hereafter *PVL*). In his recent article on Pereyaslavl', Martin Dimnik considers this appearance of the name a 'first mention'. However, he labels the account of the actual foundation of Pereyaslavl', to be found later in the same chronicle, a 'legend'.¹ In so doing, Dimnik reflects the prevailing attitude to these two particular types of sources, which have come together in the *PVL*: the Russo-Byzantine treaties, and those texts which originate in folklore.²

The *Tale of the Foundation of Pereyaslavl'* is undeniably embedded in folkloric elements, combining as it does the single-combat motif with an aetiological legend which supplies the name 'Pereyaslavl'' with an etymology. Nevertheless, does this mean that Dimnik and his predecessors are correct in this question of the antiquity of Pereyaslavl'; and are scholars in general fully justified in placing such confidence in the information conveyed by the Russo-Byzantine treaties?

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¹ *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 27, 1982, pp. 173–76.

² Most scholars working on the period have, directly or indirectly, expressed an opinion on the subject but few adduced any arguments in support. The point of view argued here was earlier suggested by A. G. Kuz'min in his *Nachal' nye etapy drevnerusskogo letopisaniya*, Moscow, 1977, p. 33. The general attitude towards these two types of sources is, however, still better represented, among historians, by M. N. Tikhomirov's classic book on the Russian towns: *Drevnerusskiye goroda*, 2nd edn, Moscow, 1956, pp. 308 f.: the 993 account is 'clearly a later tradition' (*yavno pozdneysheye predaniye*), whereas the 907 treaty is 'undoubtedly a genuine document' (*nesomnno podlinnyy dokument*). Among literary historians, A. Stender Petersen and D. S. Likhachev are of a similar opinion. In his study of the single-combat motif Stender Petersen calls the Pereyaslavl' legend 'ein schlimmer Anachronismus' with reference to the treaties: *Die Varägersage als Quelle der altrussischen Chronik*, Copenhagen, 1934, p. 157. For Likhachev, the attribution of the foundation of Pereyaslavl' to Vladimir in spite of the earlier mention in the treaty proves that a cycle of legends was already in formation around the figure of Vladimir at the turn of the eleventh century: *Russkiye letopisi i ikh kul' turno-istoricheskoye znacheniye*, Moscow, 1947, pp. 164 f; cf. also his commentary to the *PVL*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1950, p. 347. On the treaties, see also H. Rüss in *Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, vol. 1, Stuttgart, 1981, p. 214.

The *Tale of the Foundation of Pereyaslavl'* may be summarized as follows: Vladimir Svyatoslavich meets a Pecheneg attack at a ford on the river Trubezh 'where now Pereyaslavl' stands' (*gde nyne Pereyaslavl'*). The two armies stand on either side of the river, neither daring to attack. The Pecheneg prince then suggests the issue be decided by single combat. Vladimir, unable to find a suitable champion among his men, is then approached by an old man, who claims to have a younger son, undefeated since childhood, in addition to the four sons who accompany him on the campaign. The youth, 'of no more than medium size', is summoned and having first proved his prowess against a bull, defeats the Pecheneg giant. Afterwards the Pechenegs take flight, and Vladimir decides to found a town named Pereyaslavl' at the ford, since it was there the youth had won himself glory (*pereya slavu*).³

The chronicler's version of this *Tale*, which dates the foundation of Pereyaslavl' to the last decade of the tenth century, stands in contrast to the evidence of the treaties, which are more or less fully transcribed into the Chronicle. Of the four treaties thus included, 'Pereyaslavl'' is mentioned in two: twice in the 907 treaty and once in the 944 treaty.⁴ In each instance it appears as the third element of the formula 'Kiev, Chernigov, Pereyaslavl''. This formula first occurs in the paragraph describing the distribution of tribute which the Byzantines have been forced to pay. A portion of the tribute is to be forwarded to the Russian towns: 'first to Kiev, then to Chernigov, Pereyaslavl', Polotsk, Rostov, Lyubech and the other towns, in which reside princes subject to Oleg'. The second and third appearances of 'Pereyaslavl'' are found in the corresponding treaty stipulations organizing future trade relations. According to these, Russian merchants arriving in Constantinople are to receive monthly subsidies, 'first those from Kiev, then from Chernigov, Pereyaslavl' and the other towns'.⁵

³ Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisey (hereafter *PSRL*), 2, St Petersburg, 1908, cols 106–08. The date for this entry is often given as 992, on the basis of the Laurentian MS (*PSRL*, 1, Leningrad, 1926, cols 122–24). But the Laurentian MS is obviously defective in its chronology, whereas the Hypatian and Khlebnikov MSS agree with the auxiliary MSS to the Laurentian edition, the Radziwill and Academy MSS.

⁴ In the *PVL* the four treaties are placed under 907, 911, 944 and 971. The two earliest have been treated with some doubt. Thus the 907 treaty has been considered either a preliminary to the 911 treaty, or a misplaced part of it, as the corresponding portion is lacking in the 911 treaty. Moreover, a number of scholars, particularly Byzantinists, have altogether rejected the historicity of Oleg's campaign in 907 and the two ensuing treaties. This view is, however, hardly tenable after the contributions by G. Ostrogorsky, 'L'Expédition du prince Oleg contre Constantinople en 907' (*Annales de l'Institut Kondakov*, vol. 11, pp. 47–62, reprinted in his *Byzanz und die Welt der Slawen*, Darmstadt, 1974, pp. 17–34); ε → A. A. Vasiliev, 'The Second Russian Attack on Constantinople' (*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. VI, Cambridge, Mass., 1951, pp. 161–225.)

⁵ *PSRL*, 1, cols 31, 49.

Indisputable as this evidence seems, we must not forget that the treaties were relative late-comers to the chronicle. We can say with certainty that they were not included in the *PVL*'s immediate predecessor; in the *PVL* the treaties stand as secondary insertions in a pre-existing text. The younger version of the First Novgorod Chronicle represents exactly such a text.⁶ This predecessor is thought to have been compiled ca. 1093, which means that the treaties were included in, and at least to some extent adapted to, the surrounding chronicle text some 150 or 200 years after they were concluded. This insertion led to a number of substantial changes in both the structure and the contents of the chronicle. With this in mind, the possibility that the text of the treaties themselves has been subject to some manipulation during the process of insertion cannot be excluded. A first suspicion that this may have been the case arises from the formula itself: 'Kiev, Chernigov, Pereyasavl' has a certain eleventh-century flavour about it.

The order of precedence undoubtedly apparent in the formula conspicuously resembles that inherent in the system of succession operating after the death of Yaroslav the Wise in 1054, and possibly instituted by him. The exact nature of this so-called 'seniority system' is disputed.⁷ But a comparison of the way the problem of succession to the Kievan throne was solved before and after 1054 makes clear that some new system had been instituted. This change was accompanied by a new attitude among potential contenders, an attitude the *PVL* was anxious to support. Both Yaroslav and his father Vladimir Svyatoslavich had emerged victorious from prolonged fratricidal struggles before they could succeed to undisputed power in Kiev. It required eight years and two dead brothers for Vladimir; while it took Yaroslav twenty-one years and no fewer than ten brothers dead and one imprisoned. Nothing so traumatic happened after Yaroslav's death.

The post-Yaroslav era starts with the so-called 'Testament', in which Yaroslav allocates towns among his five surviving sons so that the oldest, Izyaslav, gets Kiev; Svyatoslav, Chernigov; Vsevolod, Pereyasavl'; Igor', Vladimir; and Vyacheslav, Smolensk. This

⁶ This is particularly clear as regards the 971 treaty, which is inserted between Svyatoslav's stated wish to go to Rus' for more men and his actual setting off to do so ('poidu v Rus' i privedu bolshi družinu' (treaty) 'i poide v lodyakh'): see *Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis'*, Moscow, 1950 (hereafter *NPL*), p. 123; and *PSRL*, 1, cols 71–73.

⁷ See G. Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, New Haven, 1948, pp. 178 ff; A. D. Stokes, 'The System of Succession to the Thrones of Russia, 1054–1113', in *Gorski Vijenac: A Garland of Essays offered to Professor E. M. Hill*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 268–75; and the chapter 'Das Kiever Seniorat von 1054 bis 1169', by H. Rüss in *Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, vol. 1, Stuttgart, 1981, pp. 323 ff. Aspects of the subsequent exposition have been further developed in J. H. Lind, 'The "Brotherhood" of Rus': A Pseudo-Problem Concerning the Origin of Rus' (*Slavica Othinienia* 1982, vol. 5, Odense, 1983, pp. 66–79).

allocation is accompanied by admonitions to the brothers to live in love and peace with one another. Yaroslav particularly instructs the younger ones to heed their oldest brother Izyaslav just as they have heeded him, Yaroslav; and Izyaslav himself to help any of his younger brothers wronged by another.⁸

In spite of these admonitions there are few subsequent signs of any special prominence of the eldest brother. During the next two generations, from 1054 to 1113, the Kievan state seems to be ruled not by the senior prince in Kiev but by a triumvirate consisting of the princes of Kiev, Chernigov, and Pereyaslavl'. Admittedly, Kiev did continue to be the seat of the senior prince, to which the other two princes would succeed in turn. This system works, seemingly without friction, for the first nineteen years. It reaches its apogee in 1072 with that supreme celebration of brotherly love and unity, the *translatio* of their uncles, Saints Boris and Gleb. The following year's break-up of the brothers is distressing for the chronicler, who sees in it the work of the devil. This first period of tripartite rule is followed by a short spell of civil war, and by the precarious rule of Vsevolod, the sole survivor of the first-generation triumvirate, from 1078 to 1093. With the accession of the second generation we find the triumvirate re-established: first, in the persons of Svyatopolk Izyaslavich in Kiev, Vladimir Monomakh in Chernigov and his younger brother Rostislav Vsevolodich in Pereyaslavl'; then with the Svyatoslavichi back in Chernigov after Rostislav's early demise during their joint campaign against the Polovtsians, and Vladimir's forced retreat from Chernigov to Pereyaslavl'. Admittedly, Oleg Svyatoslavich proves an unwilling participant, but it is obvious from the joint entreaties to him from Svyatopolk and Vladimir that they desire its re-establishment. As David Svyatoslavich emerges as the dominant Chernigov prince after the Uvetichi meeting in 1100, the triumvirate is once more operative during a lengthy period of campaigns, for the most part against the Polovtsians, which culminate in the remarkable victory of 1111 at the river Salnitsa.⁹

The position of prince had doubtless become less dangerous since the reigns of Yaroslav and his predecessors. These beneficial innovations in the principles of succession and execution of power were supported by a dynastic ideology stressing the concepts of 'brotherhood' (*bratiya*) and descent from a common ancestor, Yaroslav.¹⁰ Although ardently voiced by the chronicler, these ideals

⁸ *PSRL*, 1, cols 161 f.

⁹ *PSRL*, 1, cols 161 f., 166 f., 181, 218 f., 226, 228 f., 273, 277–80, 284; *PSRL*, 2, cols 264–73.

¹⁰ Note the much increased frequency of the use of *bratiya* to describe the collective of Yaroslavid princes after 1054; see further the above mentioned article 'The "Brotherhood" of Rus' (fn. 7).

were hardly his invention. Rather, the ideology must have been backed by a number of princes sufficient to render it functional for at least sixty years.

The new system did not, in the long run, secure efficient rule, and it may even have created more problems in the twelfth century than it solved in the eleventh. But it did firmly establish the concept of Kiev, Chernigov, and Pereyasavl' as the ruling triangle of Rus'; the embodiment of Rus', so to speak, at the turn of the century. In other words the formula 'Kiev, Chernigov, and Pereyasavl'' in the treaties coincides precisely with the relative political importance of these towns in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. How does this compare with the situation prior to 1054 if one momentarily disregards the evidence of the treaties?

We shall first look at the urban system of Rus' as it is presented in the remainder of the *PVL*.

Until 1054, the non-treaty portions of the *PVL* list no fewer than thirty-two towns. Quite a few of these are mentioned several times. Kiev and Novgorod of course appear throughout the text; Polotsk is mentioned four times (first occasion 862); and Smolensk (Introduction), Lyubech (882), Pskov (903), Vyshegorod (946), Berestovo (980), and Tmutorokan' (988) are all mentioned three times. Nine more towns, some of considerable age like Ladoga and Rostov, appear twice. Pereyasavl' and Chernigov, however, are each mentioned only once, and are respectively the twenty-fifth (in 993) and the twenty-seventh (1024) towns to be mentioned.¹¹ This lack of frequency does not accord well with the importance conferred upon these towns by the treaties fifty to a hundred years earlier, even considering that coincidence may have played its part in deciding which towns received mention.

We do not, however, have to rely entirely on such uncertain statistics. Apart from the treaties, an order of precedence is indicated on at least one occasion. Under '988' Vladimir is said to portion out towns for the residences of his many sons, from the eldest one down. The list of towns runs as follows: Novogorod, Polotsk, Turov, Rostov, Murom, Vladimir, and Tmutorokan'. All except Vladimir, which was founded by Vladimir himself, are also mentioned elsewhere in the chronicle prior to 1054. Again, the absence of Chernigov and Pereyasavl', later so important as princely seats, is hardly consistent with the importance attributed to them in the treaties.¹²

¹¹ The references are readily obtainable by use of the geographical index to *PSRL*, 1, pp. 557-66.

¹² *NPL*, p. 159; *PSRL*, 1, col. 121.

Certain foreign sources are also relevant to this question: in both Greek and Norse literature we find passages capable of illuminating the status of towns in early Kievan Russia.

The *De administrando imperio* (DAI) by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in any case one of the best sources of information about early Russian history, is here of particular interest as its ninth chapter contains a famous account of how the Russians organize their trade in Constantinople, in which a number of Russian towns are mentioned as starting places for their ships. According to Dimitry Obolensky, who has furnished the latest edition with a comprehensive and lucid commentary, this information most likely originated with one of the envoys who negotiated the trade treaty of 944. The towns mentioned in the DAI are thought to be Novgorod, Smolensk, Lyubech, Chernigov, Kiev, and Vitichev.¹³ If the connection between this information and the negotiation of the treaty of 944 is indeed so close, it is surprising that Pereyasavl' is not found important enough to be included, considering it ranks third and is the last town trading with Constantinople to be specified by name in the text of the treaty itself. There is no reason to think that the received text of the DAI — a manuscript from the late eleventh century — does not correspond to the text as committed to writing in the mid-tenth century. We do know, however, that the text of the treaty was adapted for inclusion into a chronicle which fervently supported the concept of Russian unity around the principalities of Kiev, Chernigov and Pereyasavl' around 1100.

Although the old Norse sources should perhaps be used more cautiously, they indicate the same conclusions. Their information was only committed to paper two or three centuries after its actual collection, which makes it difficult to establish with precision the period to which it refers. However, if we assign the information on Russian geography to the late tenth or early eleventh centuries, when the number of Scandinavians entering Russia, and — perhaps more importantly — returning, was at its peak, we are probably not far off the mark. This is the period upon which the Sagas are best informed, and to which the majority of runic stones which describe travels to the East belong.

In the geographical material the three towns which occur frequently in the Sagas — Novgorod (Hölmgard), Kiev (Kænugard), and Polotsk (Palteskia) — are of course represented. But in the miscellany called *Hauksbok* from ca. 1325 we find a text which

¹³ The Greek transliterations of the Russian names are not equally transparent, but 'Pereyasavl' is certainly not included: see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, vol. 1, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, Budapest, 1949, pp. 57–63; Obolensky's commentary in vol. 2, *Commentary*, ed. R. J. H. Jenkins, London, 1962, pp. 16–61.

supplies a number of additional names. This text, called *Heimslýsing* (World Illumination) is based primarily on Latin sources, but includes additional information on East Europe. Here the main towns (*hofuð garðar*) of Russia are listed as: Moramar, Rostofa, Súrðalar, Hólmgarðr, Syrnes, Gaðar, Palteskia, Kænugarðr.¹⁴ Of these, Murom, Rostov, Suzdal', Novgorod, Polotsk and Kiev are readily identifiable; and only the identification of 'Syrnes' and 'Gaðar' is problematic. 'Chernigov' has been suggested for the former, which is not impossible although one would then think that 'Gaðar' had originally been the last part of that name, the result of a mistaken partition.¹⁵ In any case, by no stretch of the imagination can Pereyasavl' be read into the list.

The towns mentioned in the Greek and Norse sources are not exactly the same, which is not surprising considering their geographically opposed origins. It is with some assurance, however, that we can assume that the towns held in common — Kiev, Novgorod, Smolensk, and perhaps Chernigov — must have been those foremost in Rus', especially since this picture corresponds well to that revealed by the Russian sources, again perhaps with reservations in the case of Chernigov. Neither the Greek nor the Norse accounts, however, mention Pereyasavl'.

The archaeological evidence is similarly silent on Pereyasavl' at the time of the treaties. Of course, a lack of archaeological evidence proves little: new excavations may soon disrupt confirmed beliefs. However, apart from the fact that nothing earlier than the late tenth century has been unearthed so far, what has been found in fact tends to support the supposition that it was Vladimir who founded Pereyasavl'. The fortifications which have emerged from excavations are entirely consistent with the type unearthed at Belgorod.¹⁶ As we know from an earlier entry in the Chronicle, Belgorod was founded by Vladimir in 992 and populated with inhabitants from other towns.¹⁷

This evidence should be viewed in connection with Vladimir's town building policy explained in the 988-entry by the utterance, attributed to Vladimir himself, 'it is not well that there are so few

¹⁴ *Manuscripta Islandica*, ed. Jón Helgason, Copenhagen, 1960, fol. 3v; see also E. A. Mel'nikova, 'Drevnyaya Rus' v islandskikh geograficheskikh sochineniyakh' in *Drevneyshiy gosudarstva na territorii SSSR: Materialy i issledovaniya* 1975, Moscow, 1976, pp. 141–56; and O. Pritsak, *The Origin of Rus'*, vol. 1: *Old Scandinavian Sources Other than the Sagas*, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, pp. 530–37.

¹⁵ Mel'nikova, op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁶ A. Poppe has surveyed the archaeological evidence in *Stownik Starożytności Słowiańskiej*, vol. iv, 1970, p. 56.

¹⁷ *NPL*, p. 165; *PSRL*, 2, col. 106. The corresponding entry in the Laurentian MS is placed under 991 and in the Radziwill and Academy MSS under 990: see *PSRL*, 1, col. 122.

towns around Kiev', obviously with reference to the danger presented by the Pechenegs from the steppes. Vladimir's programme resulted in towns being built on the rivers Desna, Oster, Trubezh, Sula, and Stugna, and populated with the 'best men' from a number of Northern Slavonic and Finnish tribes.¹⁸ No site names are given in this connection. Belgorod, however, was obviously one town. Vasiliev, on the Stugna, must have been another because it is of the same type as Belgorod and Pereyasavl'; it was given Vladimir's baptismal name; and it is mentioned for the first time in 996 in connection with the defence against the Pechenegs.¹⁹

Now, as Pereyasavl' is typologically consistent with other town-fortifications which must be attributed to Vladimir, as we have no reason to doubt that Vladimir did in fact found a town on the Trubezh and we know of no other on this river apart from Pereyasavl', and finally as the account of Pereyasavl's foundation according to the *Tale* coincides on essential points with the policy outlined in 988,²⁰ we have every reason to believe that the 'legendary' *Tale* is correct, as far as the foundation of Pereyasavl' is concerned.

Finally, we can point to one further written source which, although significant to any discussion about chronicle writing prior to the *PVL*, is usually ignored by historians since it contains so few pieces of factual information. This is the so-called *Pamyat' i pokhvala Vladimiru*, attributed to the eleventh-century monk James. *Pamyat'* consists of three parts, which were probably independent from the start. The last consists of an annalistically-ordered sequence of events chronologically contingent on the main event of the reign, the baptism.²¹ This account, completely void of folkloric elements, can hardly be suspected of dependence on the *PVL*, especially if we

¹⁸ *PSRL*, I, col. 121.

¹⁹ V. A. Bulkin, I. V. Dubov, G. S. Lebedev, *Arkheologicheskiye pamyatniki Drevney Rusi IX-XI v.*, Leningrad, 1978, pp. 15 f.

²⁰ It is obvious from the *Tale* that Pereyasavl' is founded on virgin land, which explains the necessity of summoning the population from afar. Furthermore, the connection with the defence against the Pechenegs is obvious both from the *Tale* and Vladimir's fortification policy.

²¹ The text is reprinted in A. G. Kuz'min, *Russkiye letopisi kak istochnik po istorii Drevney Rusi*, Ryazan', 1969, pp. 225-32; see also A. A. Shakhmatov, *Razyskaniya o drevneyshikh russkikh letopisnykh svodakh*, St Petersburg, 1908, pp. 13-28; and M. N. Tikhomirov, 'Nachalo russkoy istoriografii' (*Voprosy istorii*, Moscow, 1960, reprinted in *Russkoye letopisaniye*, Moscow, 1979, pp. 61 f.). Shakhmatov proposes, with no real justification, that in the *Pamyat'* 'Pereyasavl' is a secondary substitution for 'Belgorod' by a later redactor who knew the exposition in the *PVL* (p. 28). But such an assumption seems unlikely since the *PVL* also mentions the foundation of Belgorod, which, according to its predecessor, took place not in the fifth, but in the fourth year after the baptism (see *NPL*, pp. 159, 165). Admittedly, the account of the baptism in the chronicles is highly complex and has given rise to much speculation as to exactly how and when it took place. No doubt the chronicle compilers of about 1100 were themselves confused.

accept its dating to the eleventh century. Rather, it combined with the main source of the *PVL* (which, as we know from the younger version of the First Novgorod Chronicle, knew of the foundation of Belgorod only, in the fourth year after the baptism), to constitute the *PVL* text; and at the same time provided the compiler of the *PVL* with an opportunity to add another Vladimir 'legend' from his stock. The 'mythification' of the 993 entry thus seems to be a secondary expansion of an ordinary entry in the annals.

The evidence presented by the Russo-Byzantine treaties about the order of precedence among the early Russian towns is apparently inconsistent with that of all the other relevant sources. This inconsistency seems to stem from early twelfth-century interpolations into the tenth-century text of the treaties, in the process of adapting them to the text of the *PVL*. Consequently we must reject the treaties as sources on this subject. To maintain with A. D. Stokes that 'Rus' proper' is to be identified with 'Kiev, Chernigov, and Pereyaslavl', with their satellite areas' as far back as the reigns of Oleg and Igor' is to subscribe to an anachronism.²²

Finally, we must cease to give automatic preference to the evidence of the 'documentary' treaties over other sorts of source material in the *PVL*, even when confronted with those folkloric elements which the rigorous classificatory principles of modern historical scholarship have banished to the domains of other disciplines.

²² *Companion to Russian Studies*, 1: *An Introduction to Russian History*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 57; similar statements can be found in a number of works, e.g. *Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, vol. 1, pp. 271 f., 372, to mention a further recent case.